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CONCERNING ACTING.

BY RICHARD MANSFIELD.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN once attended a performance of Shakespeare's *Tempest* as presented by an actor of great reputation. He stated afterward that in spite of the magnificence of the production, which he described at great length, he would prefer seeing the play in a barn, provided the actors engaged spoke their words clearly, and with sense and feeling. I am quite of Mr. Andersen's opinion. The extravagance of the stage to-day is alarming. It is not only alarming: it is the ruin of the pure drama. There seems to be a perversion of the advice concerning the mirror and nature entirely in favor of inanimate objects, and we are called upon to admire the ingenuity of the master carpenter and the fidelity of the scene painter, to the almost entire extinction of the art, *pur et simple*, of the actor. What is the art of the actor? It is the expression in voice, in word, in face, and in form of the emotion born of the situation devised by the author. The voice must be the voice of the peculiar individual portrayed by the actor, attuned to the emotion, it must be either harsh or gentle, winsome or repellent, powerful or feeble, but it must never betray the limit of the organ. The words, no matter what the voice may be, must be comprehensible. That is the first duty the actor owes the author, at least. The eye, the mouth, the figure, must be in harmony.

An actor, in portraying various characters diametrically opposite, has no right to offer his own personality in each. That is not the art of acting. The business sense of a man who has learned that the more the public is familiarized with the individuality of an actor the greater his popularity, is a poor excuse for bad acting.

The true student will merge himself in the character he presents, and he will present each creature as he conceives him, or as the author has painted him. A man who cannot so envelop himself in the robe of the part, who cannot be this man to-day and that man to-morrow, no matter how smart a fellow he may be, cannot be considered an actor.

There are numberless professions open to clever people without voices and without other necessary requirements for the stage. They may be statesmen, and some actors of reputation seem to enjoy an ability in that direction far beyond any qualification for our art; they may be priests and parsons; they may be barristers and lawyers—in all these parts they need never rob the public of a view of their own estimable personality; upon the stage they must. It is absurd for Fagin to be Romeo, and Romeo, Benedict—you may label them, but there is no deception, and the art of the actor is deception.

Time was when an actor declaimed the lines of Shakespeare, and that was enough. It isn't enough to-day. The world does not stand still, nor does the art of acting. Declaiming is not acting; the actor must pretend to be what he is not; he must be what he pretends to be. There is a royal road to success—it is humbug. There is no royal road to success on legitimate lines:—it means endless labor, heart-ache, sorrow, and disappointment. If you desire to be an actor, you must choose the latter—you will be welcome. The actor, lives for his art; the world may see the pictures he paints, the lessons he inculcates; he breathes life into them for a moment; they fade away and die; he leaves nothing behind him but a memory. The actor has no connection with scenery and mechanism, he does not perceive them—he should not know that they surround him; the picture of the place, be it what it may, is the creation of his fancy, and what he sees there he contrives to communicate to his audience. He can, if he will, bring with him the salt air of the sea, the perfumed atmosphere of the boudoir, the flower-scented zephyr of the grove, or the dank breath of the cloister. His day is study, his evening the result. He should have no opinions to buy, no critics to placate, no axes to grind or wires to pull. You can buy opinions one way or another, you can win hosts of friends, you can grind axes and pull wires, and achieve wealth and fame, but you will not achieve art! And the crowd of sycophants and cour-

tiers cannot still the voice within that tells you every hour, "You're a lie!"

Do not be led away by men who tell you to be original—in other words, to be odd and eccentric and to attract attention to yourself by these means. Do not strive to be original; strive to be true! If you succeed in being true, you will be original. If you go forth to seek originality, you will never find truth. If you go out to seek truth, you may discover originality. Do not be dazzled by the success of chicanery or charlatanism. You will not find it satisfying, for, however much you may impress others, you will never believe in yourself, unless you are insane. The mediocre actor generally enjoys popularity, he offends no one and arouses no jealousies—and mediocrity is easy of comprehension. The merchant will tell you that the rarest products are unsalable.

The actor who plays to the groundlings, who has a good word for every one, who has never racked his nerves or tortured his soul, who has not earned his bread and salt with "*Kummer und Noth*," who has not realized the utter impossibility of ever accomplishing his ideal, who is not striving and searching for the better in art, who is content to amass wealth by playing one part only; the actor, in short, who is not unsatisfied, is a poor fool of an actor.

It is impossible for an actor to attempt an arduous rôle and having done his full duty to be as unruffled and calm and benign as a May morning.

The very centre of his soul has been shaken; he has projected himself by force of will into another being, another sphere,—he has been living, acting, thinking another man's life, and you cannot expect to find him calm and smiling and tolerant of small troubles, dumped back on a dung heap after a flight to the moon.

If, when the curtain has fallen, you meet this clever calculating and diplomatic personage, know that you are not in the presence of an actor. He is, no doubt, a thousand times more pleasant to encounter, more charming in society, *gratissimus* to the fatigued, harassed, often humiliated and misunderstood newspaper hack,—but he is not an actor.

The actor is *sui generis*, and in the theatre not to be judged by the ordinary rules applied to ordinary men. The actor is an extraordinary man, who every evening spends three hours or more in fairyland and transforms himself into all kinds

of odd creatures for the benefit of his fellow men; when he returns from fairyland, where he has been a king or a beggar, a criminal doomed to death, a lover in despair, or a haunted man, do you fancy the aspect of the world and its peoples is not tinged with some clinging color of his living dream ?

It is an open question whether the true actor should be seen in society (Edmund Kean held that he should not), or whether he should remain a mystery to his fellow men. The writer is of the opinion that there is no reason why an actor off the stage should not behave like an ordinary mortal and enjoy as much as he may the pleasures of life. But the writer is also of the opinion that there is no necessity for an actor to bear about him the pungent odor of the *coulisses*. There is no claim on him to deport himself in any other wise than an honest man when he walks abroad. He can refrain from calling attention to himself by means which would be ridiculed if employed by other men. He need not wear his hair long, or gaze fixedly into vacancy, or pretend to be lost in poetic thought, or stride or pose, or wear odd garments. He may, in short, behave like a man, unless he has made up his mind to demean himself into a perambulating advertisement.

The actor's art will be more widely honored by thinking men when they discover in the actor the unostentatious manners of a simple gentleman. Men will not blame the actor for eccentricities or idiosyncrasies which he may have inherited, or for which nature or ill health is responsible; they will accept them as they accept them in other friends, but they will be swift to perceive their assumption for a purpose.

Aside from the personal opinion of individuals the public has no concern whatever in the private life of the actor ; it belongs to him as much as it belongs to the lawyer, the painter, the writer, or the architect, or to any other free-born citizen.

The stage is the actor's studio and gallery of exhibition ; away from it his deeds are of no moment, and many actors would be less known and others more popular if the world judged the actor only by his work.

Society, as a whole, cares very little for art. True art without the humbug is as little tolerated in society as a nude figure.

Concerning the condition of the Drama in Europe, the writer recently discovered in a French MS. by an unknown writer

the following fairy tale and he has taken some pains to translate it. The MS. is evidently not complete, for it breaks off abruptly, but none the less it may chance to interest :

L'ENFANT DRAME DE LA RECLÂME.

“About thirty or forty years prior to the conclusion of the 19th Century a child was born in London, in England, to a certain Monsieur de la Reclâme. This gentleman had married a young lady in his own station of life, a Demoiselle Regardez-moi. The infant had a number of godparents. They were indeed so numerous it is impossible to name them all. The most popular was a Japanese idol, a hideous and grotesque personage, but an extraordinary favorite in the salons of the wealthy ; M. Impressioniste, who was received and admired everywhere for the reason that nobody understood what he talked about ; Messieurs Jaundice and Longhair, who were always arm in arm, and many others. There were also godmothers : Madame Mère-Romaine, a stout lady who had lived at the French Court and who wore a garment which resembled a sack. She had four daughters. The eldest, Miss Chin, was a middle-aged, angular person who arranged her faded yellow hair in a tuft over a low forehead and whose chin seemed to say forever to the rest of the body, ‘Come along, follow me.’

“The second sister was named ‘Grasp.’ She was a faded flower, and the process of several divorce suits had slightly tarnished the lustre of her early beauty. This young person had an engaging manner of throwing out her hands as if to snatch something, and she rarely frequented any house where draperies which she might clutch were not hung in profusion. The other two girls were twins and were called Cling and Flop, and all four sisters were generally followed by long-haired and pale-faced youths who spoke like women and wore corsets.

“The infant had other sponsors, and I must not forget a renowned virtuoso who could whisper to a piano, sit upon it, tickle it, beat it, dust it with his hair, and all the while extract from it the most heart-rending melodies.

“Not many moons after the birth of the child, Monsieur and Madame de la Reclâme were receiving their friends in their suburban villa. It was Saturday evening. Monsieur de la Reclâme had published, to his entire satisfaction, a weekly

journal called 'Paul Pry,' of which he was the proprietor and editor, and he was now enjoying, in the bosom of his family and of his numerous contributors, the full delights of an easy conscience and of lawful crime. Long lines of carriages stretched like the serpents of Laocoon from his door, for although no one acknowledged the acquaintance of Monsieur de la Reclâme, nobody dared to refuse his invitation, and as Madame de la Reclâme's drawing-rooms were shrouded in Cimmerian darkness, it was easy to be present without detection. The guests having departed and the servants having withdrawn, the lights were turned up, and Monsieur de la Reclâme produced from a cupboard a flacon of rare liquor which had been presented to him by a young orphan girl, concerning whom he had generously suppressed a very valuable paragraph. The clock in the church near by, in which Monsieur and Madame de la Reclâme owned a pew, had just chimed twelve, when these estimable people were disturbed by a violent noise in an adjacent pantry. Both the lady and gentleman sprang in alarm to their feet. A voice at Monsieur de la Reclâme's elbow said quietly :

" 'Do not disturb yourself and do not be afraid,' and the worthy couple beheld a gentleman, who had a red face and a bald head and who was in full evening dress.

" 'Sir !' exclaimed Monsieur de la Reclâme, 'this intrusion ! I must beg you——'

" 'Pardon me,' said the stranger, 'for my somewhat unceremonious entrance. I am a Genie of whom you have no doubt heard. My name is Venale—and I always come in through the pantry.

" 'I am here,' continued the Genie, pouring himself out fully a tumbler from the flacon before Monsieur de la Reclâme and imbibing the liquor with a gentle sigh, 'I am here to speak to you about your boy, whom I destine for the highest honors, providing you agree to my terms.'

" 'Sir,' replied Monsieur de la Reclâme, 'I am highly sensible of the honor you do me, but I have already decided upon a profession for my son, that of a wealthy man.'

" 'Pardon me,' said the Genie somewhat coldly, 'you are probably unaware that you owe all your good fortune to me, and that by the simple process of turning my back upon you, you would be utterly ruined ; however, I will overlook your impertinence this

time, as I am excessively fond of you, but you must give me a decisive reply at once, because I have a supper engagement with a prominent public man.'

"Monsieur de la Reclâme being now thoroughly frightened, assured the Genie that he would consent to anything the Genie proposed.

"'Very well, then,' said the Spirit. 'I shall claim the right to christen your son, and I shall bestow upon him the ancient name of 'Drame,' and since you have been so hospitable and obliging, I shall obtain from my intimate friend the Prime Minister the title of Baron, and your son will, therefore, rejoice your heart as Baron Drame de la Reclâme.'"

"Both the overjoyed parents were about to give full expression to their gratitude when, by a slight movement of his hand, the Genie pocketed Monsieur de la Reclâme's gold repeater which had been lying on the table at the publisher's elbow.

"'I never accept words,' said the Genie haughtily. 'From this day forth I shall watch over your son. I shall guide every step of his life. I shall be wherever he is. I shall rule his destiny. Above all I shall make him renowned. Baron Drame de la Reclâme will surpass, will supersede, all who have ever borne the name.'"

The last words, spoken with great majesty, were accompanied by an action which embraced two solid silver candleabra and the Genie disappeared.

Here the MS. has been torn, mutilated, and is no longer legible.

RICHARD MANSFIELD.